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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between teachers' perceived eagerness to communicate within the classroom and students' perceived affective learning. Subjects were 88 students and 9 instructors at a proprietary business school in a large midwestern city. Teachers completed a 21-item self-report questionnaire assessing their communication eagerness in the classroom, and students, a 24-item questionnaire reporting their attitudes about learning. Results indicated that the mean for the perception of communication eagerness revealed a moderate to low score (70.4) with a range from 62 to 83, and the mean score for affective learning was moderate (43.2) with a range of 31 to 58. Simple correlations were computed within the 2 scales. Results revealed a strong significant positive relationship between a student's overall affective learning score and both the content and behavior subscales. However, findings suggest no significant relationship between affective learning and the instructor. A bivarate correlation procedure was used to assess the relationship between teacher eagerness and affective learning. Findings suggest that, while the preoperational stage offers a rich area for scholarly pursuit, it seems most appropriate to study variables in this stage of the instructional model, not in isolation, but in relational dimensions. (Included are 2 tables of data and 26 references.) (Author/CR)

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Examining the internal characteristics of the teacher: The effect of perceived eagerness on student affective learning.

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Abstract

Relationships between teachers' communication eagerness and the affective component of learning were examined. Based on a lack of research on self-perceived, communication related characteristics of the teacher, this study is concerned with the relationship between a teacher's perceived eagerness to communicate within the classroom and a student's perceived affective learning. Results indicate no significant relationship between perceived communication eagerness by the teacher and the affective component of student learning. While the preoperational stage offers a rich area for scholarly pursuit, findings indicate that it seems most appropriate to study variables in this stage of the instructional model, not in isolation, but in relational dimensions.

The intent of the proposed research is to provide a clearer understanding of the communicative relationships between teacher and student. Scholars within instructional communication choose different constructs and methods to gather and interpret data. In the past, research involving classroom interaction processes has failed to include perceived internal characteristics of the teacher. This investigation examines one of these characteristics and its impact on learning. More specifically, this study examines the relationship between teachers' perceived communication eagerness and affective learning.

Within the communication discipline, there are many domains that merit scholarship, and communication scholars have increasingly focused research on the relationship between communication and learning. This pursuit has lead researchers to define a body of theory and research as instructional communication. While research has been fruitful, the instructional domain has consistently fought for its distinctive identity separate from the domain of communication education. Sprague (1992) states that "communication education is devoted to the pedagogy of effective communication, while instructional communication investigates the role of communication in the teaching of all subjects at all levels" (p. 1). Clearly both

domains rely on the classroom context for research explorations. The distinction can be defined by the specific characteristics of a classroom. The instructional communication researcher is not constrained by the content of that classroom. All classrooms serve as potential research environments for those interested in defining the teacher-student relationship from an instructional communication framework.

In terms of this research framework, much needs to be learned concerning the teacher-student relationship. Past research studies within this domain have been categorized in different ways. Staton-Spicer and Wulff (1984) describe several research focuses including teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and teaching strategies. The intent of this study is to examine more thoroughly those phenomena related to teacher characteristics and to provide a rationale, strategy, and proposal for the advancement of research within the instructional communication domain.

In instructional communication, one can approach the teacher-student relationship from a number of perspectives. The most common approach has relied on external assessments. The student reports perceptions of the instructional behaviors of the teacher. Most researchers identify three stages of instruction.

Staton-Spicer and Marty-White (1981), for example, conclude that "the preoperational stage focuses on teacher characteristics, the process stage involves the observation of teachers' actual classroom behaviors, and the product stage assesses the instructional process by measuring student outcomes" (p.354).

Most often scholars have directed research toward understanding the relationships between the process and product stages. Friedrich (1987) describes this approach as "research centered on identifying linkages between instructional strategies (processes) and learning outcomes (products)" (p. 7). While this research has provided insight into the influences of the teacher-student relationship, it has ignored the preoperational stage in the study of instructional communication. The preoperational stage enables researchers to understand and examine the role of internalized teacher characteristics and their influences within the teacher-student relationship.

It is in the preoperational stage where researchers need to direct more attention. Powers, Nitcavic, and Koerner (1990) conclude "the significance of this research area lies in the potential to uncover antecedent conditions impacting positive/negative teacher orientations and, ultimately, classroom communication decisions and outcomes" (p. 227). With more

attention on the preoperational stage, researchers can better understand the process and product stages in the instructional communication model.

Much needs to be learned about the underlying characteristics that impact the teacher-student relationship. Staton-Spicer and Marty-White (1981) conclude that "to understand the teacher as a communicator, it is necessary to understand the teacher's concern about communication, the actual classroom communication behavior, and the teacher's perspectives about the behavior" (p. 365). Self-perceived communication behaviors of the classroom teacher as it relates to process-product research has received little attention. Scholars in the instructional communication domain must begin to more closely study the whole instructional communication model (preoperational, process, and product) as an environment for the interaction between teachers and students.

Much instructional communication research has examined learning in the classroom based upon perceptions of the communication behaviors of the instructor. Researchers have identified communication styles (Andersen, Norton, Nussbaum, 1981, Norton, 1977), verbal and nonverbal immediacy (Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Kelly & Gorham,

1988; Powell & Harville, 1990), and teacher-student patterns of interaction (Gorham, 1985; Staton-Spicer & Marty-White, 1981). Studies of communicator style, verbal and nonverbal immediacy, and patterns of interaction within the classroom have most often been investigated by measuring students' perceptions and their relationship to learning. While assessments of student perceptions are needed, researchers must also study self-perceived teacher characteristics that impact the classroom learning environment. Relying only on student perceptions is too restrictive. Allen and Shaw (1990) conclude "there is a need to add teachers and students' perceptions of communication and teaching effectiveness to this equation in order to accurately determine those variables which contribute to the success in the learning process" (p. 320).

Another area of research interest for the instructional communication scholar has been describing and defining effective teaching. Teaching effectiveness is affected by classroom behaviors. Nussbaum (1981) states:

> Teaching experience can also be causally linked to an instructor's relaxed style. As an instructor becomes more familiar with his/her role as a teacher and with the given material, he/she should become less apprehensive about the

> classroom experience and thus exhibit more relaxed behavior. Much the same reasoning can.be used with other background variables, even though there is little empirical evidence to support such claims. (p. 739)

These teacher characteristics, such as background information (sex, age, experience, education, socioeconomic status), communication styles, immediacy behaviors, and motivation to communicate, have received limited attention in assessing teaching effectiveness from an internalized teacher perspective. Staton-Spicer and Marty-White (1981) state "it is imperative to examine not only a teacher's classroom communication behavior, but also one's perspective on communication" (p. 354). One's perspective on communication is often a direct result of, or influenced by, one's background. Communicator style has been identified as a key construct in the instructional communication literature. Sallinen-Kuparinen (1992) concludes:

> Teacher communicator style relies on overt behavioral manifestations. Concomitantly, in most studies, students have been asked to assess the communicator style displayed by their teacher. Self-reports of teachers as well as peer and supervisor assessment techniques also have been utilized. Various perspectives tap different aspects on

> style manifestations and raise the question, who should assess teacher communicator style? (p. 155)

In studying the teacher-student relationship, it is important to know the perception a teacher maintains about his/her communication within the classroom. There is a discrepancy between self-reported teacher perceptions and student perceptions of teachers' communication style. Sallinen-Kuparinen (1992) concludes that "in general, teachers viewed themselves as better communicators and more effective teachers than the students did" (p. 157). The fact that this discrepancy is visible supports the need for increased scholarship focused on preoperational aspects of the instructional communication model. One must not oversimplify the instructional communication model by excluding preoperational stages in classroom research.

Kearney (1984) states "from a relational perspective, it is important to note both the way in which a teacher views him/herself as a communicator in the classroom and the ways in which students perceive the teachers' TCS (Teacher Communicator Style) in that same environment" (p. 99). The value of defining and assessing teachers' perceptions about their communicative behavior should not be underestimated. Teachers have reasons for the practices they use in the classroom. Staton-Spicer and

Marty-White (1981) state "teachers' concerns can be categorized according to the self as a communicator, the task of communicating, and the impact of ones' communication on others" (p. 355).

There are many constructs that impact the teacher-student relationship. A teacher's motivation to communicate in the classroom, for example, impacts the instructional communication model. Zorn (1991) states "developing competence or the ability to communicate effectively, does not always result in better communicative performance in actual interactions. To say that one is motivated to communicate is to say that one wants or is willing to do so" (p. 385). Teachers bring much "luggage" with them to the classroom. This "luggage" may take the form of teacher training, level of experience, content being presented, demands outside the classroom, and language or cultural barriers. These factors influence the behavior of the teacher. Gorham and Christophel (1992) state that "one of the assumptions which has grounded instructional communication studies is that the behavior of the teacher influences the behavior of the student. Research concerned with linking specific teacher behaviors to motivational outcomes and existing instructional communication models has been sparse" (p. 239). Behaviors teachers exhibit within the

classroom context are directly influenced by the way they perceive themselves.

While classroom behaviors of teachers contribute much to the instructional communication process, assessing their behavior as a student-measured perception prompts communication scholars to question the criteria. Student evaluations of such constructs as instruction, immediacy, motivation, and communicator style are quite common. A major drawback to relying solely on this approach is the difficulty one has in assessing the relationship of the interaction to a specific construct. McLaughlin, Erickson, and Ellison (1980) conclude:

> A teacher may be highly nondirective in dealing with students and still be less effective than a more directive colleague. It could be the case that "developing student ideas," for example, does not coincide with a student's expectations about ideal teacher behavior. (p. 24)

The difficulty with these assessments is not the variables themselves, rather the unique communication relationships that the teacher and student form in the classroom. These unique human communication encounters are, at best, semi-predictable; but, by including those teacher perceptions in the classroom interaction model, the research scholar is seeking a deeper

understanding of the instructional communication model.

A teacher's behavior may be initiated by their own preferences or by the perceived preferences of their students. Richmond (1990) states:

> When we do something because we prefer to do that thing, we are motivated to do it. When we do something because another person wants us to do that thing, even though we would prefer not to do so, we are complying with another person's wishes. (p. 182)

This notion of compliance verses motivation can be assessed from an internalized teacher perspective. Teacher behavior is often a result of compliance behavior which may result from pressures associated with administrative, colleague, or student concerns. While much research in this area has been related to the variables of immediacy behavior (Kelly & Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987) and teacher affinity-seeking behaviors (Gorham, Kelly, & McCroskey,1989), little has been done to measure the extent of teachers' perceptions of teachers' use of immediacy, affinity-seeking, power, and other related instructional communication constructs. Such a focus could only improve and build upon existing phenomena within the classroom.

Some studies have sought to determine shared perceptions of

the teacher and student. McCroskey and Richmond (1983) studied shared perceptions of the teacher and student in relation to power in the classroom. These authors conclude:

> Since teachers and students do not have the same perceptions of power use, and the differential perceptions cannot be simply explained by self-serving interests, the question that needs to be addressed is, whose perceptions are right? Or, to put it another way, whose perceptions should be researched? (p. 183)

In all likelihood, researchers in instructional communication will continue to raise these sorts of questions in relation to classroom environments. Underlying these then exists the assumption that both teachers and students bring a subjective quality to the interrelationships of the instructional communication model. The subjective nature of classroom interaction provides support for balancing the focus of instructional research. This balance needs to include a greater emphasis on internalized teacher characteristics and perceptions as they relate to classroom behaviors and assessment of student-perceived effectiveness.

All the instructional communication constructs discussed in this review center around teacher behaviors found in classroom

interaction. The common bond that all of these teacher characteristics share is the potential influence they have in the teacher-student relationship. Teachers make choices about the type and amount of classroom behaviors they exhibit on any given day. Each teacher brings to the classroom a specific set of personal characteristics that influence the behaviors in any given communicative context. These antecedent factors are most often grouped as motivation-related variables. These variables shape the range of communicative behaviors teachers' display. From a preoperational framework, the assumption underlying these teacher behaviors is the teachers' communication eagerness or motivation to communicate. Zorn (1991) concludes:

> Constructs relevant to motivation to communicate, as well as the instruments used to operationalize them, may be distinguished. Motivation-related variables are treated as situational or cross-sectional. This dimension also has been referred to as the "state vs. trait" distinction. At issue is whether the particular variable is a relatively stable personality trait or subject to situational fluctuations (p. 386).

Depending upon a scholar's intent in understanding how instructional communication is influenced by teacher motivation,

one can use a trait motivation or a state motivation measure. Because the concern is primarily with how individual teachers differ in their motivation, a cross-situational measure is most appropriate. Zorn (1991) states "a coherent conceptualization of the motivation to communicate process is lacking" (p. 385).

Problem Statement

A scholar interested in advancing instructional communication theory is concerned with the investigation of the teacher-student relationship. The study of these relationships must include the preoperational, process, and product stages of instruction. Staton-Spicer and Marty-White (1981) state "studies that focus solely on the process have not made provision for, and have not taken into account, the teacher's perspective about the process" (p.355). The fundamental premise of this preoperational investigation of the teacher-student relationship is that it is necessary to begin initial inquiry on a forgotten stage of the instructional communication model. Because this stage has yet to be explored in depth, a basic investigation is needed: "Does a relationship exist between a teachers' perceived eagerness to communicate and affective learning in the classroom?"

METHOD

The ability of the survey method to ask respondents specific questions regarding their behaviors is central in this study. The first sample of respondents, the teachers, were be asked to assess their perception in terms of eagerness to communicate in the classroom, while the second sample of respondents, students, assessed their attitudes toward learning. Because one of the purposes of this study is to describe teacher-student characteristics and perceptions, a straightforward research strategy is desired.

It is assumed that communication eagerness and affective learning probably influence one another and the most accurate indicators of the variables can best be attained by having individuals self-report. Self-report questionnaires were administered because the variables under investigation reflect a respondent's inner state. The survey, self-report questionnaire, is the most appropriate research vehicle for answering this research question.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 91 students and 12 Instructors at a proprietary business school in a large Midwestern city. Because some data was unusable, the final sample size for data

analysis and interpretation was 88 students and 9 Instructors.

Procedures and Measures

Teachers were asked to complete a twenty-one item self-report questionnaire assessing their communication eagerness in the classroom. The communication eagerness scale (Pearson, DeWine, & Willer, 1984) includes six subscales: with a stranger, in a non-threatening situation, when the outcome is predictable, when the outcome is not predictable, about personal topics, and hesitancy to communicate (Cited in Zorn, 1991). Responses were made on a 5-point, Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." This twenty-one item instrument was slightly modified from a interpersonal context to an instructional one. The modification was constructed by substituting the word student(s) for individual(s) in the items stem. A cover letter accompanied the instrument which explained the purpose, provided directions for completion, and indicated where to leave completed forms.

Students were asked to complete a twenty-four item questionnaire reporting their attitudes about learning. The affective learning scale measures student attitudes toward the course content, the instructor, and the behaviors recommended in the course. This semantic differential scale (McCroskey,

Richmond, Plax, & Kearney, 1985; Wheeless, 1975) measures students' attitudes with four, seven-step, bi-polar scales: good/bad, worthless/valuable, fair/unfair, and positive/negative. Careful instructions were given to the research assistant to ensure consistent administration of the survey.

A brief introductory paragraph accompanied the instrument explaining the purpose, providing directions, and establishing confidentiality. All subjects were given scoring sheets with a predetermined two digit number. The coding system enabled the researcher to compare the teachers' self-report instruments with the students' corresponding affective learning questionnaires.

To demonstrate measurement reliability, alphas were calculated for both instruments. The communication eagerness scale reported a moderate alpha of .65. While the scale was slightly modified, future pilot-testing will help reduce error and increase the effectiveness of the instrument. The affective learning scale reported an alpha of .94. This strong reliability indicator supports previous use of the instrument. Gorham and Zakahi (1990) report alphas greater than .90. The conceptual use of these instruments in the past supports the validity and leads one to conclude that the measuring instruments reflect the conceptual definitions of the constructs.

RESULTS

The research question dealt with whether there is a relationship between the antecedent factors of teachers, specifically communication eagerness, and the affective component of learning. The mean for the perception of communication eagerness reveal a moderate to low score (70.4) with a range from 62 on the low end to 83 on the high end. The mean score for affective learning also reveal a moderate score (43.2) with a range from 31 to 58.

Simple correlations were computed within the two scales. Findings reveal a strong significant positive relationship between a students' overall affective learning score and both the content (pearson's r = .0968) and behavior (pearson's r = .8222) subscales, while no significant relationship was reported between affective learning and the instructor (see Table 1). Likewise, a significant positive relationship was found between a teachers' overall communicative eagerness and their interactions with new students or students who may be strangers (pearson's r = .7500). More importantly a bivarate correlation procedure was used to assess the relationship between teacher eagerness and affective learning.

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Table 1

Inter-Item Correlations Among Affective Learning and Subscales	
Content	.9068**
Behavior	.8222*
Instructor	.7255
1-tailed significance	*-.01 **.001

Inter-Item Correlations Among Eagerness and Subscales	
With a New Student	.7500*
Nonthreatening Situation	.5678
Predictable Outcome	.5678
Unpredictable Outcome	.5678
Discussing Personal Topics	.5276
Hesitancy to Communicate	-.2673
1-tailed significance	*-.01

Findings revealed no significant relationship between the two (Pearson's r = .0374). Further analysis controlling for student gender and rank (i.e. traditional vs. nontraditional) likewise reported no significant relationships (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

While it is most desired to isolate and find significant relationships, it is also possible that no interaction may be beneficial in excluding variables from future theoretical models. In fact, the statement of no relationship between communication eagerness of the teacher and the affective component of learning

Table 2

Correlations Controlling For Gender And Student Rank.	
males/traditional	.4880
males/nontraditional	-.1690
all males	.1309
females/traditional	-.1511
females/nontraditional	.1429
all females	.0011
all traditional	.0519
all nontraditional	.0330
Overall	**.0374**

may be lawful and lead to limiting the choices for future variables in which to assess the predictors for affective learning in the classroom. This study suggests that generally the communicative eagerness of teachers in instructional settings in and of itself has minimal impact on student affective learning. One explanation for these findings is that the affective learning scale employed in the research seems to be more of a conceptual measure for the content and behavioral dimensions in the classroom, then instructor dimensions (see Table 1). Thus, isolating an instructor variable like communication eagerness doesn't allow for all classroom influences presently being measured by the affective learning scale. Future research might consider instructor variables with the instructor dimension items of the affective learning scale

(McCroskey, Richmond, Plax, and Kearney, 1985; Wheeless, 1975).

However, this study does indicate student attitudes toward learning are heavily influenced by the content and/or subject matter within that classroom. Thus, providing questions about the importance of content versus instructor dimensions. Future research might consider working toward identifying classroom characteristics that make either the instructor or the content the perceived source of the affective component of learning. One implication of this finding for the instructional environment is to stress the importance of preparing, organizing, and presenting the content of a given course in a manner that is understandable and manageable for the student.

Finally, many notions regarding the influence of teacher characteristics on student learning remain in question. Future research should continue to examine the dynamic process within the instructional communication context. Process and product research has been beneficial, yet more studies need to explore the preoperational stage within the instructional framework. Additionally, variables within the preoperational stage need to be studied, not in isolation, but in relational dimensions.

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